

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5312

INFO AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

C O N F I D E N T I A L CALCUTTA 0936

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINT, CGEN, SREF, VN, IN

SUBJ: SITUATION IN SAIGON

1. THE FOLLOWING REPORT ON CURRENT SITUATION IN SAIGON WAS GIVEN TO CONOFF BY VIETNAMESE NATIONAL WHO DEPARTED SAIGON APRIL 13TH. WE HAVE NO RPT NO MEANS OF EVALUATING THE SOURCE'S RELIABILITY BUT PASS THIS ON FOR WHAT IT IS WORTH. SOURCE WAS FORMERLY EMPLOYED BY CHINESE COMMERCIAL BANK IN SAIGON.

2. THE SITUATION REMAINS TENSE AMONG THE SAIGONESE BECAUSE OF THE UNCERTAINTY REGARDING THE GOVERNMENT'S FUTURE ACTIONS, THE LACK OF EMPLOYMENT, RISING PRICES AND THE SCARCITY OF BASIC COMMODITIES. RICE WHICH WAS FORMERLY RATIONED AT 15 KGS, PER PERSON/PER MONTH SHORTLY AFTER THE FALL OF SAIGON, LATER REDUCED TO 9 KGS. PER PERSON/PER MONTH HAS BEEN FURTHER REDUCED TO 5 KGS PER PERSON/PER MONTH AND THE RUMOR IS THAT RICE MIGHT NOT BE AVAILABLE IN SAIGON IN THE MONTH OF MAY. MEAT IS RATIONED AT 1 KG. PER FAMILY BUT IT IS EXPENSIVE, OFTEN NOT RPT NOT AVAILABLE EVEN AFTER WAITING ON QUEUES FOR HOURS. VEGETABLES AND FRUITS ARE AVAILABLE BUT ALSO EXPENSIVE. MEDICINE, ESPECIALLY ANTIBIOTICS, MUST BE BOUGHT ON THE BLACKMARKET, WHICH IS
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BOTH DANGEROUS AND PROHIBITIVE IN PRICE.

3. ADDING TO THE FEELING OF INSECURITY ARE REPORTS THAT IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE ELECTION WHICH WILL MERGE THE GOVERNMENTS OF NORTH AND SOUTH VIET NAM, SCHEDULED TO BE HELD, ACCORDING TO SOURCE, BEFORE THE END OF APRIL, THE "EXCESS POPULATION" IN SAIGON WILL BE FORCED TO LEAVE. SOURCE STATES THAT PSYCHOLOGICAL AND ECONOMIC PRESSURE ARE ALREADY BEING USED TO MAKE PEOPLE RETURN TO THE VILLAGE BUT THIS PRESSURE HAS NOT RPT NOT BEEN SUCCESSFUL. THE FEELING OF DESPAIR IS SO PREVALENT THAT AT THE END OF MARCH A RUMOR CIRCULATED IN SAIGON THAT FRENCH AND AMERICAN VESSELS WERE STANDING OFF VUNG TAU FOR THOSE WHO WANTED TO LEAVE AND THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD NOT RPT NOT INTERFERE. MANY PACKED THEIR LUGGAGE AND LEFT FOR VUNG TAU WHERE THEY WERE IMMEDIATELY ARRESTED. SOURCE DID NOT RPT NOT GO BECAUSE HER PAPERS WERE ALREADY IN ORDER AND SHE WAS UNCERTAIN REGARDING THE STORY.

4. REPORTS OF FIGHTING THROUGHOUT VIET NAM, WITH NO RPT NO CONFIRMATION CONTINUE TO CIRCULATE IN SAIGON. SOME SUBSTANCE IS GIVEN TO THESE STORIES BECAUSE OF MINOR INCIDENTS IN AND AROUND SAIGON AND THE EXPLOSION OF A HAND GRENADE OR BOMB NEAR THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE IN SAIGON TOWARDS THE END OF MARCH. REPORTEDLY THE INCIDENT CAUSED NUMEROUS CASUALTIES.

5. SOURCE NOTED THAT THE NONRETURN OF ARVN OFFICERS WHO WERE SENT AWAY FOR REEDUCATION IS CAUSING SERIOUS CONCERN NOT ONLY TO THE FAMILIES OF THE OFFICERS CONCERNED BUT ALSO TO OTHERS REGARDING THE FUTURE ACTIONS OF THE GOVERNMENT. INTELLECTUALS AND SENIOR CIVILIAN MEMBERS OF THE FORMER GOVERNMENT ARE REQUIRED TO ATTEND INDOCTRINATION CLASSES ON A DAILY BASIS. OTHER MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY ARE ALSO REQUIRED TO ATTEND CLASSES. IN ADDITION A FORCED LABOR DRAFT OF MEN BETWEEN THE AGES OF 16 TO 43 EXISTS TO REPAIR ROADS, RIVERS, BRIDGES, ETC.

6. BUSINESSES PRIMARILY OF CHINESE BUT ALSO VIETNAMESE ARE BEING CONFISCATED. THOSE WHO ARE WITHOUT EMPLOYMENT SELL ALL THAT THEY OWN FOR WHATEVER PRICE THEY CAN GET. SOURCE
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SAYS THE BUYERS ARE PRIMARILY NORTH VIETNAMESE SOLDIERS AND OFFICIALS AND THIS IS CAUSING RESENTMENT. COMMERCIAL BANKS ARE SCHEDULED TO CLOSE ON APRIL 15TH AND ACCORDING TO SOURCE, ECONOMIC LIFE IN SAIGON APPEARS TO BE GOING FROM WORSE TO WORSE.
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